

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

AVON

Report Date: 1979

Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: December 1979

Community: Avon

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on irregular upland terrain. Some tillable land in central portion of town. No major ponds or rivers; however, large areas of bog and swamp. Drainage in two directions; north to Monatiquot River; and south towards Brockton.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dorchester New Grant (1636). Becomes part of South Precinct of Dorchester, 1715. Part of incorporated town of Stoughton, 1726, Third Parish (now Stoughton). Incorporated as town of Avon, 1888, with portions from Randolph and Holbrook.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Small industrial town created from Stoughton. Regional focus of trails and colonial highways south of Boston with local highway tavern and craft shops of 18th century. Brockton suburb in 19th century with shoe industry and local examples of period Victorian houses with continued 20th century suburbanization.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500 - 1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

No documented native trails. However Avon appears to be a regional junction of north/south routes. Most likely is East Main St (Route 28), the trail from the Monatiquot (Braintree) to Bridgewater, also conjectured is High St the likely trail from Punkapoag (Canton) to Great Bear Swamp (Stoughton).

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented sites reported.

C. Subsistence Pattern: Possibly hunting and trapping.

D. Observations:

Not an area of likely occupation; too far inland. Probably a "buffer" zone area.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

The native trails form the basis of the highway routes, most obviously East Main St (Route 28), the path to Bridgewater and Braintree by the mid-17th century.

B. Population:

Apparently none.

C. Settlement:

Apparently none.

D. Economic Base:

None.

E. Observations:

Too far inland for settlement; no resources to promote development.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676 - 1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

East Main St continued as primary artery, with secondary branch looping on high ground as West Main St by mid-18th century. Tavern junction at High St fosters secondary system of radiating highways to Stoughton and Easton as South, Pond and Central Sts during 18th century.

B. Population:

No separate population figured available; likely that population growth paralleled that of Stoughton.

C. Settlement Locations:

Little concentration; primarily scattered settlement along main routes.

D. Economic Base:

Town devoid of water power sites. By the middle of the 18th century shoe making was a major industry, and by the end of the period the handicraft stage was well-advanced, in which custom work was done for specific customers, often out of kitchen ells or special shops called "ten-footers."

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Relatively large number of central chimney Cape Cod cottages, probably post-dating the mid-18th century; largest concentrations along Pond Street and around West Main and South Streets. Extremely few two-story houses, most notable example located on Route 28 north of East High Street.

Commercial, industrial, institutional: None known to remain.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775 - 1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways continued as basic route system, with East and West Main Sts north/south axis between Randolph and Bridgewater. No turnpikes.

B. Population:

No separate figures; likely to have paralleled Stoughton Center as both areas developed boot and shoe industry.

C. Settlement Locations:

Slight cluster began at junction of High and Main Streets; scattered building along East Main Street and near south junction of East and West Main Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Period one of great expansion for the boot and shoemaking industry. By the early 19th century central shops such as Littlefield's were attracting workers from miles around to "take out" certain portions of shoemaking work. The central shop would then sell the product both locally and in Boston. In the years up to the Panic of 1837, the central shop developed rapidly, with increasing specialization by the domestic shoemakers still working out of "ten-footers."

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Large number of Cape Cod, center-chimney cottages (built ca. 1810-1840) with different proportions from earlier cottages of the same type, simple Federalist/Greek Revival pattern-book trim at doorways, major concentrations along Route 28, East Main Street, Pond Street and near the north end of West Main Street. Small number of 2-story, hip-roofed Federalist houses located on Route 28 near Spring Street and one on South Street.

Commercial, industrial, institutional: No known remains.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830 - 1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system remained from early 19th century. Main N/S railroad line between Boston and Fall River located along Holbrook line (1846), with secondary branch from Randolph to Stoughton as west boundary of Avon (1866) - now abandoned route.

B. Population:

No separate figures, likely to have paralleled growth of Stoughton Center.

C. Settlement Location:

Village center formed at junction of Main and High Streets; several side streets laid out south of West High Street; scattered building occurred along both East and West Main Streets.

D. Economic Base:

The period witnessed the greatest expansion of the boot and shoe industry, particularly between 1845 and the Civil War, after which the industry declined, largely paralleling Stoughton's development.

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Side-hall Greek Revival cottage and side-hall Victorian cottages became major house types in town center, particularly along West High Street, lower Central Street and East Main Street (Route 28). Several mid-Victorian houses and two-story Greek Revival-style houses existed at town center, but did not form a major part of the building of this period.

Industrial: Some "ten-footer" shops and wood-frame shoe shops may remain, although it is likely that any such survivors have been altered both in appearance and use.

Commercial: Of the small number of commercial buildings which existed, several may remain on Route 28; these are one and two stories high, have gabled facades, and appear to date from ca. 1850-70.

Institutional: Only publicly-owned buildings would have been school-houses built by the town of Stoughton; one relatively unaltered Greek Revival-style church remains at the corner of Main Street and West High Street (MHC Form #5)

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail network remains from mid-19th century. Street railway expansion from Brockton and Randolph links Avon with neighboring industrial towns along West Main St in 1890s.

B. Population:

Likely growth throughout period; steady growth of population reported after 1890; small foreign-born population made up of Irish, Canadian and Swedish immigrants.

C. Settlement Location:

New building scattered throughout built-up areas, along parts of East High Street, East Main Street and lower Central Street.

D. Economy Base:

Apparent growth of local manufacturing and industrial employment between 1895 and 1915. Growth of nearby Brockton forces that town to appropriate Avon land for water supply - for the open reservoir in 1880. In 1911 Brockton constructed two reinforced concrete 4-million gallon reservoirs adjacent.

E. Architecture:

Domestic: There is no evidence of any architect-designed houses; most houses are Queen Anne cottages, some bungalows, and modest 2-story houses with little decorative trim.

Industrial: Little evidence of new factories; few examples extant.

Commercial: Probably new buildings in town center, none remains unaltered.

Institutional: Several small-scale public buildings after separate incorporation; buildings associated with Brockton Reservoir after 1880.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Abandonment of local railroad and street railway lines in early 20th century. Main autohighway route from Boston to Brockton (ROUTE 28) constructed from East Main St in 1930s.

B. Population:

After 1915, local population grew only slightly until 1950; between 1950 and 1965, it increased rapidly, after 1965 it has increased at a slower rate.

C. Settlement Locations:

Subdivision tracts around the junction of Pond and Central Streets and around the southern junction of E. & W. Main Streets; also, house-building along formerly rural roads.

D. Economic Base:

Very small industrial/manufacturing base. Two shoe-related companies (newly established this century). Mostly retail and service industries.

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Modest, free-standing suburban houses, particularly in southern part of town; range of contemporary styles.

Industrial: Nothing built.

Commercial: Little new building; heavy alteration of existing buildings.

Institutional: Little except town-related.